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CIA failures mustn't sl

Congress' push for reforms

THOUGH THE BARRAGE of criticism now is not as heavy as in the mid-'70s, the Central Intelligence Agency is under fire again. This time, though, the complaints aren't directed at spying on American citizens and "dirty tricks" abroad. Instead there is growing concern these days that the CIA is failing in its basic job: collecting and analyzing useful foreign intelligence and getting the results to policy-makers, including the President.

The charges are serious. And so is the belief in some quarters that recent intelligence failures — in Iran and Afghanistan, for instance — are an argument for turning back the clock. By that reasoning, an effective CIA is one accountable neither to Congress nor to the American people, and efforts to reform the agency therefore must be dropped.

That's absurd. The sweeping investigations of the CIA in recent years by Congress, the press and President Ford's special commission undoubtedly contributed to its morale problems. They also have made the intelligence agencies of friendly nations wary of cooperating too closely with the CIA. But the CIA's most basic problems — the ones that seem to have led to its recent failures — pre-date the storm of adverse publicity of 1974-76.

One of these problems is the agency's heavy reliance on technical means of gathering information. Satellites, spy-planes and electronic eavesdropping are essential for monitoring military construction, missile tests, and deployment of troops, tanks and aircraft. But the most accurate reconnaissance satellite imaginable couldn't have foretold the Islamic revolution that forced the Shah to flee.

Admiral Turner: Wrecking the CIA?

Preoccupation with Russia?

The lack of good political intelligence from Iran also reflects another CIA weakness. According to some close observers of the agency, the CIA for many years has devoted too much attention and resources to the Soviet Union, at the expense of intelligence-gathering elsewhere, especially in Third World countries. Yet U.S. interests — especially when we are so dependent on imported oil, can be greatly affected by political movements that have little or no connection with Russian intrigues. (Lev Navrozov, a writer who left the Soviet Union in 1972, argues that the CIA does a poor job gathering economic and political information even within the Soviet Union, despite enormous effort.)

President Carter's appointment of Admiral Stansfield Turner to head the CIA may have compounded the agency's problems. Admiral Turner is, by most accounts, abrasive and aloof. Morale at the agency, already battered, has worsened. In 1977, he eliminated more than 800 mostly low-level jobs. Earlier this year, another 250 employees — many of them middle- and senior-level management officials — quit or retired.

The latest wave of resignations and re-

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tirements led Benjamin Schemmer, editor of the *Armed Forces Journal*, to write recently in *The Washington Post* that Admiral Turner has been a disaster. The CIA chief, according to Mr. Schemmer, is so eager to please the Carter administration that he has skewed agency reports to support administration policies.

Mr. Schemmer, and others, also charge that under Admiral Turner the CIA's traditional imbalance between information collection and analysis has tilted even more toward collection. The result, say the critics, is that the agency is swamped with more raw data than it can evaluate. Without analysis, much of the information is useless to the President and his foreign affairs advisers.

It's almost impossible for an outsider to tell whether these criticisms are valid. Admiral Turner, of course, defends his stewardship of the CIA. And while he concedes there are morale problems at the agency, he argues that this "hasn't affected the output of the organization."

Perhaps he's right. But if the current disenchantment with the CIA's performance means there will be changes, President Carter should move cautiously. Politics may dictate that Admiral Turner be replaced. But the agency has had five directors in six years. Another change at the top might simply create more confusion.

More important than the fate of Admiral Turner, though, is the move in Congress to adopt a charter for the CIA and to reorganize the intelligence community. It is essential, if the abuses of the past aren't to be repeated, that the CIA know and play by the rules.

The CIA has an essential but unpleasant role. Its agents can't be expected to behave like Boy Scouts. But they and their bosses can be expected to concentrate on their primary mission — gathering and analyzing intelligence — without engaging in dirty tricks that embarrass our country or invade the privacy of her citizens.